

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of providing advertising to a subscriber through a set top communications box connected to a television, the set top communications box having a
5 connection to a global computer network, the method comprising:

storing icons and associated advertising information on a central server connected to the global computer network;

10 transmitting the icons and associated advertising information to the set top communications box;

displaying an icon on the television screen over a television program using the set top communications box;

15 detecting an input signal indicating the icon has been selected with the set top communications box;

retrieving the advertising information associated with the icon from the set top communications box after detecting the icon was selected;

20 displaying the advertising information on the television screen with the set top communications box.

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein displaying the advertising information comprises reformatting a television program shown on the television screen and displaying the advertising information in a distinct frame
25 on the television screen.

3. A method according to claim 2, wherein displaying the icon comprises superimposing a semi-transparent icon over a television program displayed on the television

screen.

4. A method according to claim 3, wherein detecting the input signal further comprises generating a no input received signal to the set top communications box after a
5 fixed period of displaying the icon followed by displaying a second icon on the television in place of the icon.

5. A method according to claim 4, wherein the fixed period is between 1 minute and 5 minutes after the icon is first displayed.

10 6. A method according to claim 5, wherein transmitting the icons and associated advertising information comprises transmitting the icons to a memory in the set top communications box for display on the television screen and following detecting one of the icons has been
15 selected, transmitting the associated advertising information to the set top communications box.

7. A method according to claim 1, further comprising displaying the associated advertising information in place of a television program.

20 8. A method according to claim 1, wherein transmitting the icons and associated advertising information comprises transmitting the icons to a memory in the set top communications box for display on the television screen and following detecting one of the icons has been
25 selected, transmitting the associated advertising

information to the set top communications box.

5 9. A method according to claim 1, wherein detecting the input signal further comprises generating a no input received signal to the set top communications box after a fixed period of displaying the icon followed by displaying a second icon on the television in place of the icon.

10 10. A method according to claim 9, wherein the fixed period is between 1 minute and 5 minutes after the icon is first displayed.

10 11. A method according to claim 1, wherein displaying the icon comprises superimposing a semi-transparent icon over a television program displayed on the television screen.

15 12. A method of providing advertising information to distributed locations, comprising:

providing a central advertising server connected to a global computer network;

storing a collection of icons and associated advertising information on the central advertising server;

20 providing a communications box at each of a plurality of distributed locations, each communications box having means for communicating with the central advertising server via the global computer network and connected to a television;

25 transmitting the collection of icons and associated advertising information to each of the plurality

of communications boxes via the global computer network;

displaying icons on at least one of the television screens connected to the plurality of communications boxes;

5 detecting whether one of the icons has been selected;

displaying associated advertising information on the television screen in response to a selection of one of the icons.

10 13. A method according to claim 12, further comprising providing a distinct electronic address to each communications box for identifying each communications box to the server.

15 14. A method according to claim 13, wherein transmitting the collection of icons and associated advertising information comprises transmitting the icons to a memory in the set top communications box for display on the television screen and following detecting one of the icons has been selected, transmitting the associated advertising information to the set top communications box.

20 15. A method according to claim 13, wherein displaying the icons comprises superimposing a semi-transparent icon over a television program on the television screen.

25 16. A method according to claim 12, wherein transmitting the collection of icons and associated advertising information comprises transmitting the icons to a memory in the set top communications box for display on